

# Presentation to the Exeter inclusion forum.

Family and friends assessment and support team.

- By Sonia Sims and Rachel Miller.



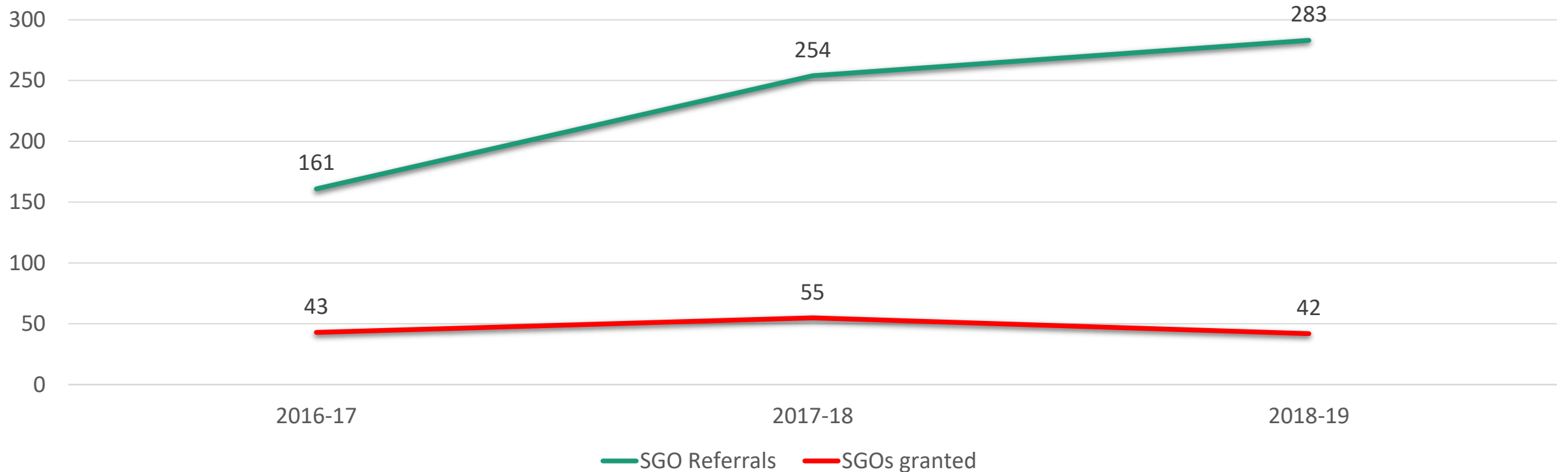
# Objectives



By the end of the session, participants should have a better understanding of: -

- The current structure of the family and friends assessment and support team in Devon.
- What makes a good assessment?
- What are the challenges?
- How we try to overcome these.
- How we engage and support special guardians.
- The way forward.

# SGO REQUESTS FOR ASSESSMENTS AND SGOs GRANTED DEVON COUNTY COUNCIL



**Implications of team being at capacity: in last 2 years assistance from 57 ISWs and SWs from other teams; delays in allocation**

# What is unique about assessing family members?

## **Will THIS family meet THIS child's needs?**

- Shift in family dynamics (power, role), transgenerational patterns (own experience of trauma)
- Understanding and motivation of the need for being assessed including background checks. SGO=permanent
- Timing: life changing decision when new role with child was not planned, practical adjustments: work, finance and accommodation
- Pre-existing bond or lack of bond
- Network and community support
- Learning required: risk awareness and learning a therapeutic parenting style

# Checks and References

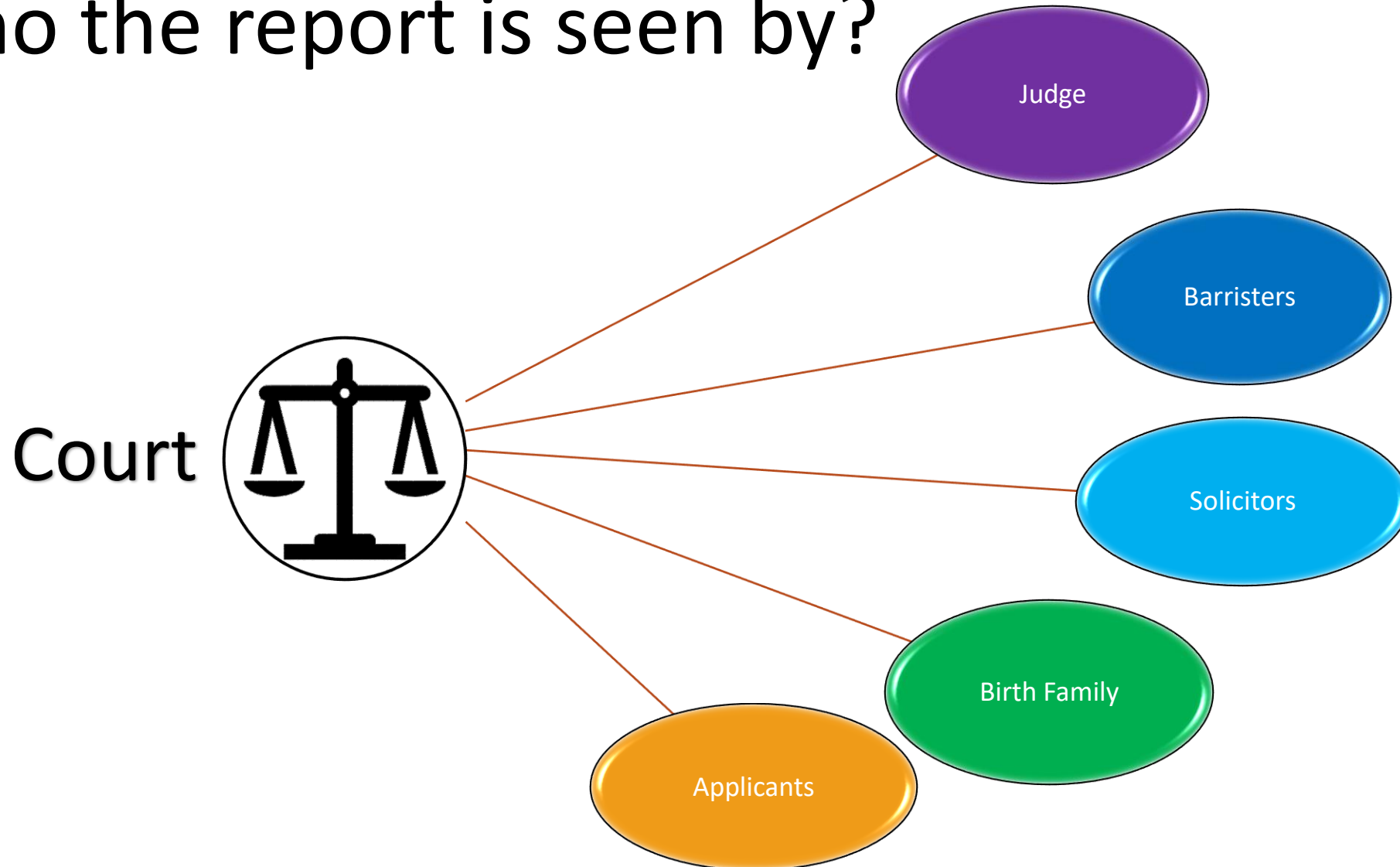
## What makes a good assessment?

- Thorough checks and references correctly completed and returned as quickly as possible.
- Ability to apply curiosity, to investigate, and seek out further references as the assessment progresses.
- Assessor's knowledge of serious case reviews and research.
- Most importantly, the assessor needs to make sense of references, and integrate these into their analysis.

## What are the challenges?

- Applicants' literacy and organisational skills.
- Lack of completed information by applicants.
- Lack of appropriate evidence to undertake the DBS procedure.
- Timescales are very varied for the completion of medical checks, personal references and DBS checks.
- References need to be followed up by the assessing social worker which can result in undertaking long journeys to do so.

# Who the report is seen by?



## **What the Special guardianship 2005 regulations say, we should be doing about offering support?**

- Financial support.
- Services for groups of children, for whom a special guardianship order is in force or in respect of whom is being formally considered.
- Services to enable special guardians and prospective special guardians and parents of the child to discuss matters relating to special guardianship.
- Assistance, including mediation services, in relation to contact between the child and their parents.

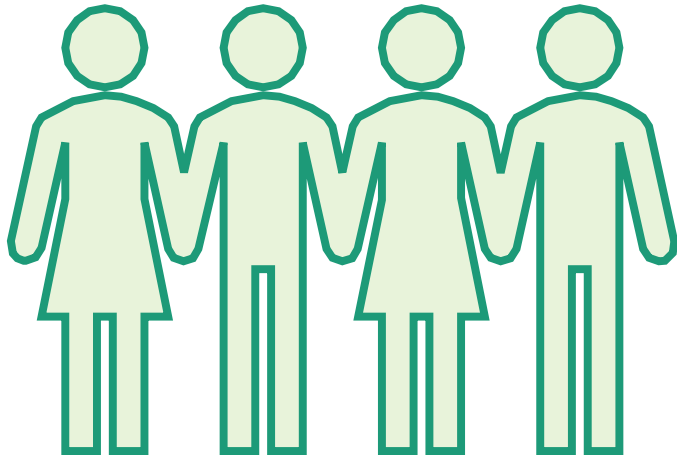




- Therapeutic services for the child.
- Assistance for the purpose of ensuring the continuance of the relationship between the child and his special guardian or prospective special guardian. This includes training for the special guardian or prospective special guardian to meet any special needs of the child.
- Respite care.
- Mediation in relation to matters relating to special guardianship orders.
- Counselling, advice and information.

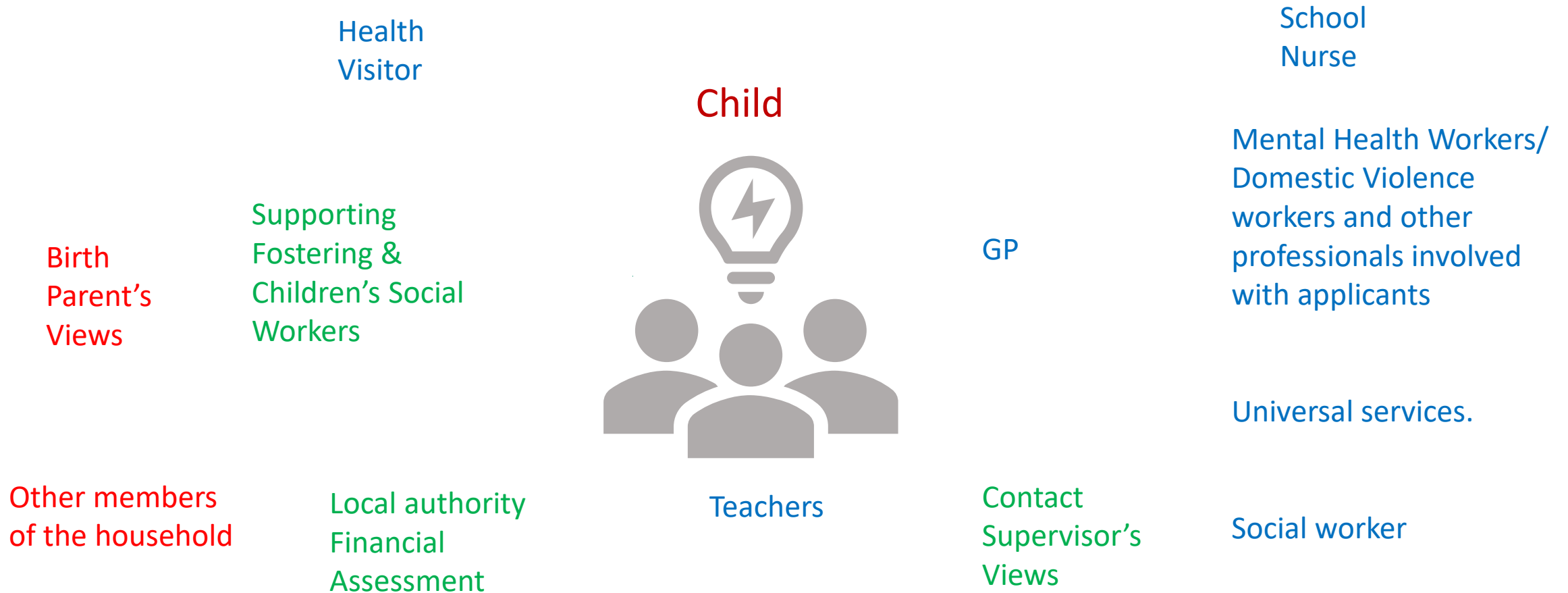


# Support plans



- A support plan is completed for every child along side the Special guardianship assessment stating how the child's needs will be met and how the carers can be supported to do this.
- This will look at the child's needs, emotional, safety, educational, health and financial and how these can be met and what support can be offered to meet these needs.

# Who contributes to the support plan to help the special guardian to meet the child's needs?





## Who are special guardians?

- We have around 66% of special guardians who are the grandparents of the child.
- We have around 20% are other family members or close friends of the family.
- The remaining 14% of special guardians are foster carers, who apply to become a special guardian to provide greater stability and permanence for the child or young person involved.
- In September 2018, there were 436 children aged 0-17 year with an SGO.
- Over 40% of these children were aged 2 years or under when the SGO was made, where as less than 5% were teenagers.

# Devon SGO Support team

- Who are we?
- We have 6 assessing social workers, a business support worker and a team manager in the assessment team. In support we have 4 family practitioners and a part time social worker and a team manager- me.
- The family practitioners are locality based. One in each locality.
- Barry covered Kath Bond's hours. Having a social worker in the team has enabled us to get to grips with some of the complex issues and the families team, contact, finance, birth parent support, mediation and any other issues that arise.



How do we meet our support requirements in Devon?

Monthly support groups in each locality- An educational psychologist currently attends one of these in each area.

Access to a educational psychologist clinic.

Rio –Fun and active group for children.  
Support and advice line and signposting.

General advice from family practitioners.

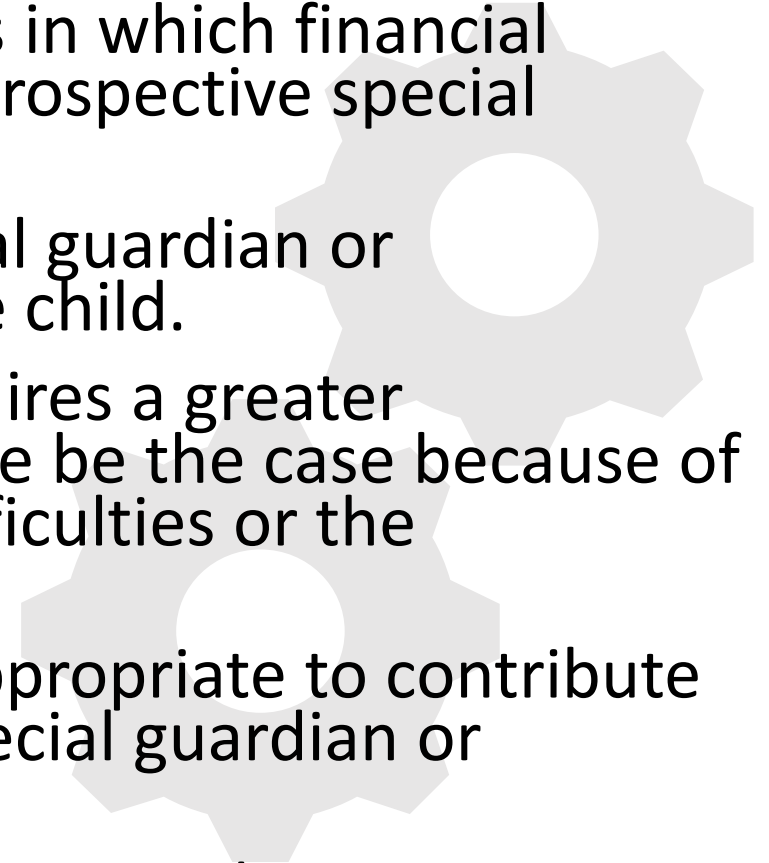
Quarterly Newsletter.

Regular Activities, such as a farm day, Escot day, pantomime, comedy night for carers.

Peer guides and a service user strategy group is currently being started.



## Financial support- The regulations say...

- The SGO regulations set out the circumstances in which financial support may be paid to a special guardian or prospective special guardian.
  - Where it is necessary to ensure that the special guardian or prospective special guardian can look after the child.
  - Where the child needs special care which requires a greater expenditure of resources than would otherwise be the case because of illness, disability, emotional or behavioural difficulties or the consequences of past abuse or neglect.
  - Where the local authority consider that it is appropriate to contribute to any legal costs, including court fees, of a special guardian or prospective special guardian associated with:
    - The making of a special guardianship order or any application to vary or discharge such an order.
    - An application for an order under section 8 of the Act (a contact order, a prohibited steps order, a residence order or a specific issue order).
    - An order for financial provision to be made to or for the benefit of the child.
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## Special Guardianship allowance rates

- Devon use a formula based on the Government model means test.
- Devon are currently making around 350 payments per week to special guardianship carers.
- Carers are asked to complete a financial assessment and allowances are worked out with this.
- We pay the allowance until the child is 18 years old and the end of the academic year, if the family meet the criteria of the annual means test.

# Complicating factors

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- Finance complaints- carers request back pay or their circumstances change and they require a reassessment.
- Contact with parents and carers.
- Our team are asked to complete Section 7 reports, however are unable to do this with a part time social worker.
- Duty to carry out an annual review of support plans (in Devon we do not have the capacity).
- Elderly Applicants and “estate and contingency planning.
- All of this is up until the child is 18 years old.





The adoption support fund.

This is government funded for children of adoption and Special Guardians to provide therapeutic support.

We have made over 190 ASF applications for therapeutic support for children including, play therapy, family therapy, didactic therapy and therapeutic parenting courses.



# Support in schools

The children are entitled to pupil premium they can access pupil premium plus if previously looked after. The school can use this however they wish. Parents need to make the school aware and schools add this to the census, which releases the funding.

Used to support the child to meet their potential either on their own or as a group.

Virtual schools can support children subject to Special guardianship orders and we are developing a partnership with them.

Plan to arrange support clinics.

0-25 team can support and advise. They can attend meetings.

Older children subject to SGO's are qualifying care leavers.



Views of the special guardians...



We have to fight hard for every bit of financial support we get

Working, even part time, just isn't possible

Our family practitioner is great and gives us excellent support

We felt under scrutiny by social services and not supported, and received contradictory advice

We try to support each other with 'respite' but some children are very challenging to care for and it's not always possible

A small amount of respite once a month would make a huge difference

Other agencies need to have a better understanding of SGOs

We need the same access to trauma informed care training as foster carers

Our children need more support with emotional and mental health issues

We need financial support - it's a huge financial commitment we hadn't planned for

Managing my own feelings and emotions during the assessment process was extremely difficult

I didn't have enough information about available legal support or advice, or how to access it

I have never seen a support plan

Many families are at breaking point and feel isolated

I need help managing contact - it is often hard to know what is best for the child

I would like to see that children with special guardians are treated the same way as any other child in need

There has to be more support for the welfare of carers

How we look to continuously improve our practice and service delivery and support we give.

- Learning from Serious Case reviews.
- Update our training.
- Research.
- Feedback from the special guardians and the young people they support.
- Team Discussions.
- Devon plan to have Strategy meetings with service users and peer guides.



# Finally....

- Devon are on a journey, to support special guardian families.
- The government and councillors are currently interested SGO's.
- A reminder that these children have met the threshold test for state intervention so will have experienced trauma and they are now being cared for with families.
- A reminder that we are small support teams for large numbers of households around approximately 500 children subject to Special guardianship Orders in Devon and more in the other local authorities.

**Thanks for your support and understanding of our work.**

